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A Fatah Official on the Intifada and Its Goals

Sakhr Habash, a member of the Fatah's Central Committee, gave a comprehensive interview to the PA daily Al-Hayat Al-Jadida concerning the Intifada and its political goals.[1] Following are excerpts from the interview:

Roots of the Intifada

"After the Camp David Summit it became clear to the Fatah movement, as brother **Abu-Ammar [Yasser Arafat]** had warned, that the next phase requires us to prepare for conflict [with Israel], because **PM Barak** is not a partner capable of complying with our people's aspirations. In light of this estimation, Fatah was the most prepared for a conflict among all other [Palestinian] national movements..."

"[The Intifada] did not break out in order to improve our bargaining ability in the negotiations, nor as a reaction to Sharon's provocative visit to Al-Haram Al-Sharif: this was only the spark. It was accumulated in the depths of our people and was bound to explode in the face of Barak's government because of the political problem that was put off for more than a year and a half -- the problem of independence. Independence was the core issue of the Intifada that broke out in Al-Aqsa and spread to the rest of the cities, camps and villages in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as in Palestinian cities and villages within the Green Line [Israel]. The Intifada endorsed the PLO's national plan that reflects the aspirations of our people: the establishment of an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital in the borders of June 4, 1967, and ensuring the Right of Return and compensation for Palestinian refugees..."

Who Controls the Intifada?

Since brother Arafat is busy with many various missions, authority was delegated to leaders in the field, who are on the lowest level of the organizational hierarchy. However, the leadership of the PA remained the source of authority, and it alone was the factor capable of leading the operations of the Intifada throughout the homeland. I can say for certain that brother Abu-Ammar is the ultimate authority for all operations, and whoever thinks otherwise, does not know what is going on..."

"When we declare the establishment of a state and independence, we will have the right to liberate the rest of the occupied land, because this land is not under dispute, as the Israelis claim, but rather it is occupied land which must return to its owners."

Intifada Negotiations

"[At the Camp David Summit] we thought that President Clinton would be able to put pressure on the Israeli government -- before leaving the White House -- so that Barak would agree to a political solution acceptable to us. But it became clear that the American position coincides with the Israeli position: sharing sovereignty over Al-Haram Al-Sharif with us, and dividing East Jerusalem into four or five parts in order to guarantee Israeli control there..."

"The series of collapsing Israeli governments proves that Israel is still unable to make peace, and at the same time it is unable to defeat the Palestinian decision-making or to diminish our national rights. Our people's steadfastness and the Intifada will continue until the arrival of an Israeli government whose leaders are brave enough to make peace. The Intifada must continue. When the Zionist society has suffered heavy losses, it will demand that its government achieve a peace based on international legitimacy. The continuation of the struggle will also influence American interests and will bring the pressure of the Administration on the Israeli government. Any damage we cause to the Zionist society and to American interests will bring us closer to our goal. Then the Zionist enemy will discover that it cannot break our will, which is the will of international legitimacy. Therefore, we must adhere to the UN resolutions, which are our strongest weapon, although they have not done us historical justice..."

The Armed Struggle

"I am well aware that the balance of power regarding an armed war [with Israel] is not in favor of our people, who cannot carry out an armed war with the Zionist entity. [The will to conduct] a military confrontation is a sort of naivete, and therefore [it is best]-- not to fight the enemy where it has an advantage over us; in such a case we

would be the losers. Nevertheless, we have weapons that the Zionist enemy does not have. The boy Fares Odeh who attacked an Israeli tank with stones and was killed - is our strongest weapon. He reflects the true image of the Palestinian people for the world which supports us..."

"In the present Intifada, the enemy attacked with helicopters, shot missiles on our posts and caused death and injury to people who have family and friends. The PA cannot limit retaliations which may include use of firearms."

"I do not support an armed war with the enemy, but I support the kind of armed struggle that will shake up the enemy and make the lives of the settlers unbearable. This is what will force them to evacuate our land, which they took by force with the support of the Israeli army..."

Islamists and Nationalists

"The coordination between the national and Islamic forces began years ago-- Lately the Islamic Jihad, the Al-Sa'iqa [the Syria based Palestinian Ba'athist faction] and the 'Popular Front - General Command' organization [led by Ahmad Jibril] have joined this [organizational] framework. The coordination is at an especially high level, more so than in the days of the great Intifada of 1987..."

"The national and Islamic forces differ in their influence, presence and size-- In order to play a decisive and effective role, they must act in coordination with one another as well as with the PA, so that their decisions do not contradict each other. At the same time, these organizations are not bound by the agreements to which the PA is committed... This situation strengthens the PA's position."

"The PA has stood by its people, protected it with force, suffered heavy losses, ended security cooperation with the Israeli government, and released prisoners from the Islamic movement."

[1] *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida* (PA), December 7, 2000.



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